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Harold the Dauntless;

A POEM,

IN SIX CANTOS.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE BRIDAL OF TRIERMAIN."

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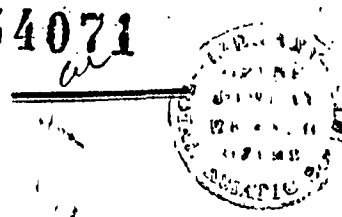

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HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

INTRODUCTION.

THERE is a mood of mind we all have known,
On drowsy eve, or dark and low'ring day,
When the tired spirits lose their sprightly tone,
And nought can chase the lingering hours away.
Dull on our soul falls Fancy's dazzling ray,
And Wisdom holds his steadier torch in vain,
Obscured the painting seems, mistuned the lay,

Nor dare we of our listless load complain,
For who for sympathy may s ek that cannot tell of pain?

The jolly sportsman knows such drearihood,
When bursts in deluge the autumnal rain, .
Clouding that morn which threats the heath-cock's brood;
Of such, in summer's drought, the anglers plain,
Who hope the soft mild southern shower in vain;
But more than all the discontented fair,
Whom father stern, and sterner aunt, restrain
From county-ball, or race occurring rare,
While all her friends around their vestments gay prepare.

Ennui!—or, as our mothers call'd thee, Spleen!
To thee we owe full many a rare device;—
Thine is the sheaf of painted cards, I ween,
The rolling billiard-ball, the rattling dice,
The turning lathe for framing gimcrack nice;
The amateur's blotch'd pallet thou may'st claim,
Retort, and airpump, threatening frogs and mice,
(Murders disguised by philosophic name,)
And much of trifling grave, and much of buxom game.

Then of the books, to catch thy drowsy glance
Compiled, what bard the catalogue may quote!

Plays, poems, novels, never read but once;—
But not of such the tale fair Edgeworth wrote,
That bears thy name, and is thine antidote;
And not of such the strain my Thomson sung,
Delicious dreams inspiring by his note,
What time to Indolence his harp he strung;
Oh! might my lay be rank'd that happier list among!

Each hath his refuge whom thy cares assail.
For me, I love my study-fire to trim,
And con right vacantly some idle tale,
Displaying on the couch each listless limb,
Till on the drowsy page the lights grow dim,

And doubtful slumber half supplies the theme;
While antique shapes of knight and giant grim,
Damsel and dwarf, in long procession gleam,
And the Romancer's tale becomes the Reader's dream.

'Tis thus my malady I well may bear,
Albeit outstretch'd, like Pope's own Paridel,
Upon the rack of a too-easy chair;
And find, to cheat the time, a powerful spell
In old romaunts of errantry that tell,
Or later legends of the Fairy-folk,
Or oriental tale of Afrite fell,

Of Genii, Talisman, and broad-wing'd Roc,
Though taste may blush and frown, and sober reason
mock.

Oft at such season, too, will rhymes unsought
Arrange themselves in some romantic lay;
The which, as things unfitting graver thought,
Are burnt or blotted on some wiser day.—
These few survive—and, proudly let me say,
Court not the critic's smile, nor dread his frown;
They well may serve to while an hour away,
Nor does the volume ask for more renown,
Than Ennui's yawning smile, what time she drops it
down.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO FIRST.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO FIRST.

I.

LIST to the valorous deeds that were done
By Harold the Dauntless, Count Witikind's son!

Count Witikind came of a regal strain,
And roved with his Norsemen the land and the main.
Woe to the realms which he coasted! for there
Was shedding of blood, and rending of hair,
Rape of maiden, and slaughter of priest,
Gathering of ravens and wolves to the feast:

When he hoisted his standard black,

Before him was battle, behind him wrack,

And he burn'd the churches, that heathen Dane,

To light his band to their barks again.

II.

On Erin's shores was his outrage known,

The winds of France had his banners blown;

Little was there to plunder, yet still

His pirates had foray'd on Scottish hill:

But upon merry England's coast

More frequent he sail'd, for he won the most.

So wide and so far his ravage they knew,

If a sail but gleam'd white 'gainst the welkin blue,

Trumpet and bugle to arms did call,
Burghers hasten'd to man the wall,
Peasants fled inland his fury to 'scape,
Beacons were lighted on headland and cape,
Bells were toll'd out, and aye as they rung,
Fearful and faintly the grey brothers sung,
" Bless us, St Mary, from flood and from fire,
From famine and pest, and Count Witikind's ire!"

III.

He liked the wealth of fair England so well,
That he sought in her bosom as native to dwell.
He enter'd the Humber in fearful hour,
And disembark'd with his Danish power.

Three Earls came against him with all their train,
Two hath he taken, and one hath he slain:
Count Witikind left the Humber's rich strand,
And he wasted and warr'd in Northumberland.
But the Saxon King was a sire in age,
Weak in battle, in council sage;
Peace of that heathen leader he sought,
Gifts he gave, and quiet he bought;
And the Count took upon him the peaceable stile,
Of a vassal and liegeman of Britain's broad isle.

IV.

Time will rust the sharpest sword,
Time will consume the strongest cord;

That which moulders hemp and steel,
Mortal arm and nerve must feel.
Of the Danish band, whom Count Witikind led,
Many wax'd aged, and many were dead;
Himself found his armour full weighty to bear,
Wrinkled his brows grew, and hoary his hair;
He lean'd on a staff, when his step went abroad,
And patient his palfrey, when steed he bestrode;
As he grew feebler his wildness ceased,
He made himself peace with prelate and priest,
Made his peace, and, stooping his head,
Patiently listed the council they said:
Saint Cuthbert's bishop was holy and grave,
Wise and good was the council he gave.

V.

" Thou hast murder'd, robb'd, and spoil'd,

Time it is thy poor soul were assoil'd;

Priest did'st thou slay, and churches burn,

Time it is now to repentance to turn;

Fiends hast thou worshipp'd, with fiendish rite,

Leave now the darkness, and wend into light:

O! while life and space are given,

Turn thee yet, and think of Heaven!"

That stern old heathen his head he raised,

And on the good prelate he stedfastly gazed;

" Give me broad lands on the Wear and the Tyne,

My faith I will leave, and I'll cleave unto thine."

IV.

Broad lands he gave him on Tyne and on Wear,
To be held of the church by bridle and spear;
Part of Monkwearmouth, of Tynedale part,
To better his will, and to soften his heart:
Count Witikind was a joyful man,
Less for the faith than the lands that he wan.
The high church of Durham is dress'd for the day,
The clergy are rank'd in their solemn array;
There came the Count, in a bear-skin warm,
Leaning on Hilda his concubine's arm:
He kneel'd before Saint Cuthbert's shrine,
With patience unwonted at rites divine;

He abjured the gods of heathen race,
And he bent his head at the font of grace;
But such was the griesly old proselyte's look,
That the priest who baptized him grew pale and shook;
And the old monks mutter'd beneath their hood,
'Of a stem so stubborn can never spring good!"

VII.

Up then arose that grim convertite,
Homeward he hied him when ended the rite;
The prelate in honour will with him ride,
And feast in his castle on Tyne's fair side.
Banners and banderols danced in the wind,
Monks rode before them, and spearmen behind;

Onward they pass'd, till fairly did shine
Pennon and cross on the bosom of Tyne;
And full in front did that fortress lour,
In darksome strength with its buttress and tower:
At the castle-gate was young Harold there,
Count Witikind's only offspring and heir.

VIII.

Young Harold was fear'd for his hardihood,
His strength of frame, and his fury of mood;
Rude he was and wild to behold,
Wore neither collar nor bracelet of gold,
Cap of vair nor rich array,
Such as should grace that festal day:

His doublet of bull's hide was all unbraced,
Uncovered his head, and his sandal unlaced;
His shaggy black locks on his brow hung low,
And his eyes glanced through them a swarthy glow;
A Danish club in his hand he bore,
The spikes were clotted with recent gore;
At his back a she-wolf, and her wolf-cubs twain,
In the dangerous chase that morning slain.
Rude was the greeting his father he made,
None to the Bishop,—while thus he said:

IX.

"What priest-led hypocrite art thou,
With thy humbled look and thy monkish brow,

Like a shaveling who studies to cheat his vow?
Can'st thou be Witikind the Waster known,
Royal Eric's fearless son,
Haughty Gunhilda's haughtier lord,
Who won his bride by the axe and sword;
From the shrine of St Peter the chalice who tore,
And melted to bracelets for Freya and Thor;
With one blow of his gauntlet who burst the skull,
Before Odin's stone, of the mountain bull?
Then ye worshipp'd with rites that to war-gods belong,
With the deed of the brave, and the blow of the strong,

And now, in thine age to dotage sunk,
Wilt thou patter thy crimes to a shaven monk,
Lay down thy mail-shirt for clothing of hair,
Fasting and scourge, like a slave, wilt thou bear?
Or, at best, be admitted in slothful bower
To batten with priest and with paramour?
O! out upon thine endless shame!
Each Scald's high harp shall blast thy fame,
And thy son will refuse thee a father's name."

X.

Ireful wax'd old Witikind's look,
His faultering voice with fury shook;—

" Hear me, Harold of harden'd heart!
Stubborn and wilful ever thou wert.
Thine outrage insane I command thee to cease,
Fear my wrath and remain at peace:—
Just is the debt of repentance I've paid,
Richly the church has a recompence made,
And the truth of her doctrines I prove with my blade.
But reckoning to none of my actions I owe,
And least to my son such accounting will show.
Why speak I to thee of repentance or truth,
Who ne'er from thy childhood knew reason or ruth?
Hence! to the wolf and the bear in her den;
These are thy mates, and not rational men."

XI.

Grimly smiled Harold, and coldly replied,
" We must honour our sires, if we fear when they
chide;
For me, I am yet what thy lessons have made,
I was rock'd in a buckler and fed from a blade;
An infant, was taught to clap hands and to shout,
From the roofs of the tower when the flame had
broke out;
In the blood of slain foemen my finger to dip,
And paint with its purple my cheek and my lip.—
'Tis thou know'st not truth, that hast barter'd in eld,
For a price, the brave faith that thine ancestors held.

When this wolf,"—and the carcase he flung on the plain,—

" Shall awake and give food to her nurselings again,
The face of his father will Harold review;
Till then, aged Heathen, young Christian, adieu!"

XII.

Priest, monk, and prelate stood aghast,
As through the pageant the heathen pass'd.
A cross-bearer out of his saddle he flung,
Laid his hand on the pommel and into it sprung.
Loud was the shriek, and deep the groan,
When the holy sign on the earth was thrown.

The fierce old Count unsheathed his brand,
But the calmer prelate stay'd his hand;
" Let him pass free!—Heaven knows its hour,—
But he must own repentance's power,
Pray and weep, and penance bear,
Ere he hold land by the Tyne and the Wear."—
Thus in scorn and in wrath from his father is gone
Young Harold the Dauntless, Count Witikind's son.

XIII.

[illegible] the feasting in Witikind's hall,
Revell'd priests, soldiers, and pagans, and all;
And e'en the good Bishop was fain to endure
The scandal which time and instruction might cure:

It were dangerous, he deem'd, at the first to restrain
In his wine and his wassail, a half-christen'd Dane.
The mead flow'd around and the ale was drain'd dry,
Wild was the laughter, the song, and the cry;
With Kyrie Eleisen came clamorously in
The war-songs of Danesman, Norweyan, and Finn,
Till man after man the contention gave o'er,
Outstretch'd on the rushes that strew'd the hall floor;
And the tempest within, having ceased its wild rout,
Gave place to the tempest that thunder'd without.

XIV.

Apart from the wassail, in turret alone,
Lay flaxen-hair'd Gunnar, old Ermengarde's son;

In the train of Lord Harold the page was the first,
For Harold in childhood had Ermengarde nursed;
And grieved was young Gunnar his master should
roam,
Unhoused and unfriended, an exile from home.
He heard the deep thunder, the plashing of rain,
He saw the red lightning through shot-hole and pane;
" And oh !" said the page, " on the shelterless wold
Lord Harold is wandering in darkness and cold!
What though he was stubborn, and wayward, and
wild,
He endured me because I was Ermengarde's child,
And often from dawn till the set of the sun,
In the chase, by his stirrup, unchidden I run:

I would I were older and knighthood could bear,
I would soon quit the banks of the Tyne and the
Wear;
For my mother's command with her last parting
breath,
Bade me follow her nurseling in life and to death.

XV.

" It pours and it thunders, it lightens amain,
As if Lok, the Destroyer, had burst from his chain!
Accursed by the church, and expell'd by his sire,
Nor Christian nor Dane give him shelter or fire,
And this tempest what mortal may houseless endure?
Unaided, unmantled, he dies on the moor!

Whate'er comes of Gunnar he tarries not here."
He leapt from his couch and he grasp'd to his spear,
Sought the hall of the feast. Undisturb'd by his tread,
The wassailers slept fast as the sleep of the dead:
"Ungrateful and bestial!" his anger broke forth,
"To forget 'mid your goblets the pride of the North!
And you, ye cowl'd priests, who have plenty in store,
Must give Gunnar for ransom a palfrey and ore."

XVI.

Then heeding full little of ban or of curse,
He has seized on the Prior of Jorvaux's purse:

Saint Meneholt's Abbot next morning has miss'd
His mantle, deep furr'd from the cape to the wrist
The seneschal's keys from his belt he has ta'en,
(Well drench'd on that eve was old Hildebrand's brain).

To the stable-yard he made his way,
And mounted the Bishop's palfrey gay,
Castle and hamlet behind him has cast,
And right on his way to the moorland has pass'd.

Sore snorted the palfrey, unused to face
A weather so wild at so rash a pace;
So long he snorted, so loud he neigh'd,
There answer'd a steed that was bound beside,

And the red flash of lightning shew'd where there
lay
His master, Lord Harold, outstretch'd on the clay.

XVII.

Up he started, and thunder'd out, "Stand!"
And raised the club in his deadly hand.
The flaxen-hair'd Gunnar his purpose told,
Shew'd the palfrey and proffer'd the gold.
"Back, back, and home, thou simple boy!
Thou can'st not share my grief or joy:
Have I not mark'd thee wail and cry
When thou hast seen a sparrow die?

And can'st thou, as my follower should,
Wade ancle-deep through foeman's blood,
Dare mortal and immortal foe,
The gods above, the fiends below,
And man on earth, more hateful still,
The very fountain-head of ill?
Desperate of life, and careless of death,
Lover of bloodshed, and slaughter, and scathe,
Such must thou be with me to roam,
And such thou can'st not be—back and home!"

XVIII.

Young Gunnar shook like an aspen bough,
As he heard the harsh voice and beheld the dark brow,

And half he repented his purpose and vow.

But now to draw back were bootless shame,

And he loved his master, so urged his claim:

" Alas! if my arm and my courage be weak,

Bear with me a while for old Ermengarde's sake,

Nor deem so lightly of Gunnar's faith,

As to fear he would break it for peril of death.

Have I not risk'd it to fetch thee this gold,

This surcoat and mantle to fence thee from cold?

And, did I bear a baser mind,

What lot remains if I stay behind?

The priests' revenge, thy father's wrath,

A dungeon and a shameful death."

XIX.

With gentler look Lord Harold eyed
The page, then turn'd his head aside,
And either a tear did his eye-lash stain,
Or it caught a drop of the passing rain.
" Art thou an outcast then?" quoth he,
" The meeter page to follow me."
'Twere bootless to tell what climes they sought,
Ventures achieved, and battles fought;
How oft with few, how oft alone,
Fierce Harold's arm the field hath won.

Men swore his eye that flash'd so red,
When each other glance was quench'd with dread,

Bore oft a light of deadly flame
That ne'er from mortal courage came.
Those limbs so strong, that mood so stern,
That loved the couch of heath and fern,
Afar from hamlet, tower, and town,
More than to rest on driven down;
That stubborn frame, that sullen mood,
Men deem'd must come of aught but good,
And they whisper'd, the great master fiend was at one
With Harold the Dauntless, Count Witikind's son.

XX.

Years after years had gone and fled,
The good old prelate lies lapp'd in lead;

In the chapel still is shewn
His sculptured form on a marble stone,
With staff and ring and scapulaire,
And folded hands in the act of prayer.
Saint Cuthbert's mitre is resting now
On the haughty Saxon, bold Aldingar's brow;
The power of his crozier he loved to extend
O'er whatever would break or whatever would bend:
And now hath he clothed him in cope and in pall,
And the Chapter of Durham has met at his call.
"And hear ye not, brethren," the proud Bishop said,
"That our vassal the Danish Count Witikind's
dead?

All his gold and his goods hath he given
To holy church for the love of heaven,
And hath founded a chantry with stipend and dole,
That priests and that beadsmen may pray for his soul:
Harold his son is wandering abroad,
Dreaded by man and abhorr'd by God;
Meet it is not, that such should heir
The lands of the church on the Tyne and the Wear,
And at her pleasure, her hallow'd hands
May now resume these wealthy lands."—

XXI.

Answer'd good Eustace, a canon old,
" Harold is tameless, and furious, and bold;

Ever Renown blows a note of fame,
And a note of fear, when she sounds his name:
Much of bloodshed and much of scathe
Have been their lot who have waked his wrath.
Leave him these lands and lordships still,
Heaven in its hour may change his will;
But if reft of gold, and of living bare,
An evil counsellor is despair."—
More had he said, but the prelate frown'd,
And murmur'd his brethren, who sate around,
And with one consent have they given their doom,
That the church should the lands of Saint Cuthbert resume.

So will'd the prelate, and canon and dean
Gave to his judgment their loud amen.

END OF CANTO FIRST.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO SECOND.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO SECOND.

I.

'Tis merry in greenwood, thus runs the old lay,
In the gladsome month of lively May,
When the wild birds' song on stem and spray
Invites to forest bower;
Then rears the ash his airy crest,
Then shines the birch in silver vest,
And the beech in glistening leaves is dress'd,
And dark between shews the oak's proud breast,

Like a chieftain's frowning tower;
Though a thousand branches join their screen,
Yet the broken sun-beams glance between,
And tip the leaves with lighter green,
With brighter tints the flower:
Dull is the heart that loves not then
The deep recess of the wild-wood glen,
Where roe and red-deer find sheltering den,
When the sun is in his power.

II.

Less merry, perchance, is the fading leaf
That follows so soon on the gather'd sheaf,

When the green wood loses the name;
Silent is then the forest bound,
Save the red-breast's note, and the rustling sound
Of frost-nipt leaves that are dropping round,
Or the deep-mouth'd cry of the distant hound
That opens on his game:
Yet then, too, I love the forest wide,
Whether the sun in splendour ride
And gild its many-colour'd side;
Or whether the soft and silvery haze,
In vapoury folds, o'er the landscape strays,
And half involves the woodland maze,
Like an early widow's veil,

Where wimpling tissue from the gaze
The form half hides and half betrays,
Of beauty wan and pale.

III.

Fair Metelill was a woodland maid,
Her father a rover of green-wood shade,
By forest statutes undismay'd,
Who lived by bow and quiver.
Well known was Wulfstane's archery,
By merry Tyne both on moor and lea,
Through wooded Weardale's glens so free,
Well beside Stanhope's wild-wood tree,
And well on Gaulesse river.

Yet free though he trespass'd on woodland game,
More known and more fear'd was the wizard fame
Of Jutta of Rookhope, the outlaw's dame;
Fear'd when she frown'd was her eye of flame,
More fear'd when in wrath she laugh'd,
For then, 'twas said, more fatal true
To its dread aim her spell-glance flew,
Than when from Wulfstane's bended yew
Sprung forth the grey goose shaft.

IV.

Yet had this fierce and dreaded pair,
So heaven decreed, a daughter fair;
None brighter crown'd the bed,

In Britain's bounds, of peer or prince,
Nor hath, perchance, a lovelier since
In this fair isle been bred.
And nought of fraud, or ire, or ill,
Was known to gentle Metelill,
A simple maiden she;
The spells in dimpled smiles that lie,
And a downcast blush, and the darts that fly
With the sidelong glance of a hazel eye,
Were her arms and witchery
So young, so simple was she yet,
She scarce could childhood's joys forget,
And still she loved, in secret set
Beneath the green-wood tree,

To plait the rushy coronet,
And braid with flowers her locks of jet,
As when in infancy;—
Yet could that heart so simple, prove
The early dawn of stealing love:
Ah! gentle maid, beware!
The power who now, so mild a guest,
Gives dangerous yet delicious zest
To the calm pleasures of thy breast,
Will soon, a tyrant o'er thy rest,
Let none his empire share.

V.

One morn, in kirtle green array'd,
Deep in the wood the maiden stray'd,

And, where a fountain sprung,
She sate her down, unseen, to thread
The scarlet berry's mimic braid,
And while the beads she strung,
Like the blithe lark, whose carol gay
Gives a good-morrow to the day,
So lightsomely she sung.

VI.

Song.

LORD WILLIAM was born in gilded bower,
The heir of Wilton's lofty tower;
Yet better loves Lord William now
To roam beneath wild Rookhope's brow;

And William has lived where ladies fair
With gawds and jewels deck their hair,
Yet better loves the dew-drops still
That pearl the locks of Metelill.

" The pious Palmer loves, I wis,
Saint Cuthbert's hallow'd beads to kiss;
But I, though simple girl I be,
Might have such homage paid to me;
For did Lord William see me suit
This necklace of the bramble's fruit,
He fain—but must not have his will,—
Would kiss the beads of Metelill.

" My nurse has told me many a tale,
How vows of love are weak and frail;
My mother says that courtly youth,
By rustic maid means seldom sooth;
What should they mean? it cannot be,
That such a warning's meant for me,
For nought—oh! nought of fraud or ill
Can William mean to Metelill!"—

VII.

Sudden she stops—and starts to feel
A weighty hand, a glove of steel,
Upon her shrinking shoulders laid;
Fearful she turn'd, and saw, dismay'd,

A Knight in plate and mail array'd,
His crest and bearing worn and fray'd,
His surcoat soil'd and riven,
Form'd like that giant race of yore,
Whose long-continued crimes out-wore
The sufferance of heaven.
Stern accents made his pleasure known,
Though then he used his gentlest tone:
"Maiden," he said, "sing forth thy glee,
Start not—sing on—it pleases me."

VIII.

Secured within his powerful hold,
To bend her knee, her hands to fold,

Was all the maiden might;

And "Oh! forgive," she faintly said,

"The terrors of a simple maid,

If thou art mortal wight!

But if—of such strange tales are told,—

Unearthly warrior of the wold,

Thou com'st to chide mine accents bold,

My mother, Jutta, knows the spell,

At noon and midnight pleasing well

The disembodied ear;

Oh! let her powerful charms atone

For aught my rashness may have done,

And cease thy grasp of fear."

Then laugh'd the Knight—his laughter's sound
Half in the hollow helmet drown'd;
His barred visor then he raised,
And steady on the maiden gazed;
He smooth'd his brows, as best he might,
To the dread calm of autumn night,
When sinks the tempest's roar,
Yet still the cautious fishers eye
The clouds, and fear the gloomy sky,
And haul their barks on shore.

IX.

"Damsel," he said, "be wise, and learn
Matters of weight and deep concern:

From distant realms I come,
And, wanderer long, at length have plann'd,
In this my native Northern land
To seek myself a home.
Nor that alone—a mate I seek;
She must be gentle, soft, and meek,—
No lordly dame for me;
Myself am something rough of mood,
And feel the fire of royal blood,
And therefore do not hold it good
To match in my degree;
Then, since coy maidens say my face
Is harsh, my form devoid of grace,

For a fair lineage to provide,
'Tis meet that my selected bride
In lineaments be fair;
I love thine well—till now I ne'er
Look'd patient on a face of fear,
But now that tremulous sob and tear
Become thy beauty rare.
One kiss—nay, damsel, coy it not:
And now go seek thy parents' cot,
And say, a bridegroom soon I come
To woo my love and bear her home."

X.

Home sprung the maid without a pause,
As levret 'scaped from greyhound's jaws

But still she lock'd, howe'er distress'd,
The secret in her boding breast;
Dreading her sire, who oft forbade
Her steps should stray to distant glade.
Night came—to her accustom'd nook
Her distaff aged Jutta took,
And by the lamp's imperfect glow,
Rough Wulfstane trimm'd his shafts and bow.
Sudden and clamorous, from the ground
Upstarted slumbering brach and hound;
Loud knocking next the lodge alarms,
And Wulfstane snatches at his arms,
When open flew the yielding door,
And that grim warrior press'd the floor.

XI.

" All peace be here—What! none replies?
Dismiss your fears and your surprise.
'Tis I—that maid hath told my tale,
Or, trembler, did thy courage fail?
It recks not—it is I demand
Fair Metelill in marriage band;
Harold the Dauntless I, whose name
Is brave men's boast and caitiff's shame."
The parents sought each other's eyes,
With awe, resentment, and surprise:
Wulfstane, to quarrel prompt, began
The stranger's size and thews to scan;

But as he scann'd his courage sunk,
And from unequal strife he shrunk.
Then forth to blight and blemish flies
The harmful curse from Jutta's eyes;
Yet fatal howsoe'er, the spell
On Harold innocently fell!
And disappointment and amaze
Were in the witch's wilder'd gaze.

XII.

But soon the wit of woman woke,
And to the warrior mild she spoke:
"Her child was all too young."—"A toy,
The refuge of a maiden coy."—

Again, " A powerful baron's heir
Claims in her heart an interest fair."
" A trifle—whisper in his ear,'
That Harold is a suitor here!"
Baffled at length she sought delay:
" Would not the Knight till morning stay?
Late was the hour—he there might rest
Till morn, their lodge's honour'd guest."
Such were her words,—her craft might cast,
Her honour'd guest should sleep his last;
" No, not to-night—but soon," he swore,
" He would return, nor leave them more."
The threshold then his huge stride crost,
And soon he was in darkness lost.

XIII.

Appall'd awhile the parents stood,
Then changed their fear to angry mood,
And foremost fell their words of ill
On unresisting Metelill:
Was she not caution'd and forbid,
Forewarn'd, implored, accused, and chid,
And must she still to greenwood roam,
To marshal such misfortune home?
" Hence, minion—to thy chamber hence,
There prudence learn and penitence."
She went—her lonely couch to steep
In tears which absent lovers weep;

Or if she gain'd a troubled sleep,
Fierce Harold's suit was still the theme
And terror of her feverish dream.

XIV.

Scarce was she gone, her dame and sire
Upon each other bent their ire:
" A woodsman thou and hast a spear,
And couldst thou such an insult bear?"
Sullen he said, " A man contends
With men, a witch with sprites and fiends;
Not to mere mortal wight belong
Yon gloomy brow and frame so strong

But thou—is this thy promise fair,
That your Lord William, wealthy heir
To Ulrick, Baron of Witton-le-wear,
Should Metelill to altar bear?
Do all the spells thou boast'st as thine
Serve but to slay some peasant's kine,
His grain in autumn storms to steep,
Or thorough fog and fen to sweep,
And hag-ride some poor rustic's sleep?
Is such mean mischief worth the fame
Of sorceress and witch's name?
Fame, which with all men's wish conspires,
With thy deserts and my desires,
To damn thy corpse to penal fires.

Out on thee, witch! aroint! aroint!
What now shall put thy schemes in joint?
What save this trusty arrow's point,
From the dark dingle when it flies,
And he who meets it gasps and dies."

XV.

Stern she replied, "I will not wage
War with thy folly or thy rage;
But ere the morrow's sun be low,
Wulfstane of Rookhope, thou shalt know,
If I can venge me on a foe.
Believe the while, that whatsoe'er
I spoke, in ire, of bow and spear,

It is not Harold's destiny
The death of pilfer'd deer to die
But he, and thou, and yon pale moon,
That shall be yet more pallid soon,
Before she sink behind the dell,
Thou, she, and Harold too, shall tell
What Jutta knows of charm or spell."
Thus muttering, to the door she bent
Her wayward steps, and forth she went,
And left alone the moody sire,
To cherish or to slake his ire.

XVI.

Far faster than belonged to age
Has Jutta made her pilgrimage.

A priest has met her as she pass'd,
And cross'd himself and stood aghast:
She traced a hamlet—not a cur
His throat would ope, his foot would stir;
By crouch, by trembling, and by groan,
They made her hated presence known!
But when she trode the sable fell,
Were wilder sounds her way to tell,—
For far was heard the fox's yell,
The black-cock waked and faintly crew,
Scream'd o'er the moss the scared curlew;
Where o'er the cataract the oak
Lay slant, was heard the raven's croak;

The mountain-cat, which sought his prey,
Glared, scream'd, and started from her way.
Such music cheer'd her journey lone
To the deep dell and rocking stone:
There, with unhallow'd hymn of praise,
She call'd a God of heathen days.

XVII.

Invocation.

From thy Pomeranian throne,
Hewn in rock of living stone,
Where, to thy godhead faithful yet,
Bend Esthonian, Finn, and Lett,

And their swords in vengeance whet,
That shall make thine altars wet,
Wet and red for ages more
With the Christians' hated gore,—
Hear me! Sovereign of the Rock,
Hear me! mighty Zernebock.

Mightiest of the mighty known,
Here thy wonders have been shown;
Hundred tribes in various tongue
Oft have here thy praises sung,
Down that stone with runick seam'd,
Hundred victims' blood hath stream'd!

Now one woman comes alone,
And but wets it with her own,
The last, the feeblest of thy flock,—
Hear—and be present, Zernebock!

Hark! he comes; the night-blast cold
Wilder sweeps along the wold;
The cloudless moon grows dark and dim,
And bristling hair and quaking limb
Proclaim the Master Demon nigh,—
Those who view his form shall die!
Lo! I stoop and veil my head;
Thou who ridest the tempest dread,

Shaking hill and rending oak—
Spare me! spare me! Zernebock.

He comes not yet! Shall cold delay
Thy votaress at her need repay?
Thou—shall I call thee god or fiend?—
Let others on thy mood attend
With prayer and ritual—Jutta's arms
Are necromantic words and charms:
Mine is the spell, that, utter'd once,
Shall wake Thy Master from his trance,
Shake his red mansion-house of pain,
And burst his seven-times twisted chain.

So! com'st thou ere the spell is spoke?
I own thy presence, Zernebock.

XVIII.

"Daughter of dust," the Deep Voice said,
—Shook while it spoke the vale for dread,
Rock'd on the base that massive stone,
The Evil Deity to own,—
"Daughter of dust! not mine the power
Thou seek'st on Harold's fatal hour.
'Twixt heaven and hell there is a strife
Waged for his soul and for his life,
And fain would we the combat win,
And snatch him in his hour of sin.

There is a star now rising red,
That threats him with an influence dread:
Woman, thine arts of malice whet,
To use the space before it set.
Involve him with the church in strife,
Push on adventurous chance his life;
Ourself will in the hour of need,
As best we may, thy counsels speed."
So ceased the Voice; for seven leagues round
Each hamlet started at the sound;
But slept again, as slowly died
Its thunders on the hill's brown side.

XIX.

"And is this all," said Jutta stern,
"That thou canst teach and I can learn?
Hence! to the land of fog and waste,
There fittest is thine influence placed,
Thou powerless sluggish deity
But ne'er shall Briton bend the knee
Again before so poor a god."—
She struck the altar with her rod;
Slight was the touch, as when at need
A damsel stirs her tardy steed;
But to the blow the stone gave place,
And, starting from its balanced base,

Roll'd thundering down the moon-light dell,—
Re-ecbo'd moorland, rock, and fell;
Into the moon-light tarn it dash'd,
Their shores the sounding surges lash'd,
And there was ripple, rage, and foam;
But on that lake, so dark and lone,
Placid and pale the moonbeam shone
As Jutta hied her home.

END OF CANTO SECOND.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO THIRD.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO THIRD.

I.

Grey towers of Durham! there was once a time
I view'd your battlements with such vague hope,
As brightens life in its first dawning prime;
Not that e'en then came within fancy's scope
A vision vain of mitre, throne, or cope;
Yet, gazing on the venerable hall,
Her flattering dreams would in perspective ope
Some reverend room, some prebendary's stall,—
And thus Hope me deceived as she deceiveth all.

Well yet I love thy mix'd and massive piles,
Half church of God, half castle 'gainst the Scot,
And long to roam these venerable aisles,
With records stored of deeds long since forgot:
There might I share my Surtees' happier lot,
Who leaves at will his patrimonial field
To ransack every crypt and hallow'd spot,
And from oblivion rend the spoils they yield,
Restoring priestly chaunt and clang of knightly shield.

Vain is the wish—since other cares demand
Each vacant hour, and in another clime;
But still that northern harp invites my hand
Which tells the wonder of thine earlier time;

And fain its numbers would I now command
To paint the beauties of that dawning fair,
When Harold, gazing from his lofty stand
Upon the western heights of Beaurepaire,
Saw Saxon Eadmer's towers begirt by winding Wear.

II.

Fair on the half-seen stream the sunbeams danced,
Betraying it beneath the woodland bank,
And fair between the Gothic turrets glanced
Broad lights, and shadows fell on front and flank
Where tower and buttress rose in martial rank,
And girdled in the massive donjon Keep,
And from their circuit peal'd o'er bush and bank

The matin bell with summons long and deep,
And echo answer'd still with long-resounding sweep.

III.

The morning mists rose from the ground,
Each merry bird awaken'd round
As if in revelry;
Afar the bugles' clanging sound
Call'd to the chase the lagging hound,
The gale breathed soft and free,
And seem'd to linger on its way
To catch fresh odours from the spray,
And waved it in its wanton play
So light and gamesomely.

The scenes which morning beams reveal,
Its sounds to hear, its gales to feel
In all their fragrance round him steal,
It melted Harold's heart of steel,
And hardly wotting why,
He doff'd his helmet's gloomy pride,
And hung it on a tree beside,
Laid mace and falchion by,
And on the green sward sate him down,
And from his dark habitual frown
Relax'd his rugged brow—
Whoever hath the doubtful task
From that stern Dane a boon to ask
Were wise to ask it now.

IV.

His place beside young Gunnar took,
And mark'd his master's softening look,
And in his eye's dark mirror spied
The gloom of stormy thought subside,
And cautious watch'd the fittest tide
To speak a warning word.
So when the torrent's billows shrink,
The timid pilgrim on the brink
Waits long to see them wave and sink,
Ere he dare brave the ford,
And often, after doubtful pause,
His step advances or withdraws:

Fearful to move the slumbering ire
Of his stern lord, thus stood the squire,
Till Harold raised his eye,
That glanced as when athwart the shroud
Of the dispersing tempest-cloud
The bursting sunbeams fly.

V.

" Arouse thee, son of Emengarde,
Offspring of prophetess and bard!
Take harp, and greet this lovely prime
With some high strain of Runic rhyme,
Strong, deep, and powerful! Peal it round
Like that loud bell's sonorous sound,

Yet wild by fits, as when the lay
Of bird and bugle hail the day.
Such was my grandsire, Erick's sport,
When dawn gleam'd on his martial court.
Heymar the Scald, with harp's high sound,
Summon'd the chiefs who slept around;
Couch'd on the spoils of wolf and bear,
They roused like lions from their lair,
Then rush'd in emulation forth
To enhance the glories of the north.—
Proud Erick, mightiest of thy race,
Where is thy shadowy resting place?
In wild Valhalla hast thou quaff'd
From foeman's skull methe-lin draught,

Or wander'st where thy cairn was piled
To frown o'er oceans wide and wild?
Or have the milder Christians given
Thy refuge in their peaceful heaven?
Where'er thou art, to thee are known
Our toils endured, our trophies won,
Our wars, our wanderings, and our woes."—
He ceased, and Gunnar's song arose.

VI.

Song.

"Hawk and osprey scream'd for joy
O'er the beetling cliffs of Hoy,
Crimson foam the beach o'erspread,
The heath was dyed with darker red,

When o'er Erick, Inguar's son,
Dane and Northman piled the stone;
Singing wild the war-song stern,
Rest thee, Dweller of the Cairn!

Where eddying currents foam and boil
By Bersa's burgh and Græmsay's isle,
The seaman sees a martial form
Half-mingled with the mist and storm.
In anxious awe he bears away
To moor his bark in Stromna's bay,
And murmurs from the bounding stern,
"Rest thee, Dweller of the Cairn!"

" What cares disturb the mighty dead?
Each honoured rite was duly paid;
No daring hand thy helm unlaced,
Thy sword, thy shield, were near thee placed,
Thy flinty couch no tear profaned,
Without, with hostile blood 'twas stained;
Within, 'twas lined with moss and fern,—
Then rest thee, Dweller of the Cairn!

" He may not rest: from realms afar
Comes voice of battle and of war,
Of conquest wrought with bloody hand
On Carmel's cliffs and Jordan's strand,
When Odin's warlike son could daunt
The turban'd race of Termagaunt"——

VII.

" Peace," said the Knight, " the noble Scald
Our warlike father's deeds recall'd,
But never strove to sooth the son
With tales of what himself had done.
At Odin's board the bard sits high
Whose harp ne'er stoop'd to flattery;
But highest he whose daring lay
Hath dared unwelcome truths to say."—
With doubtful smile young Gunnar eyed
His master's looks, and nought replied—
But well that smile his master led
To construe what he left unsaid.
" Is it to me, thou timid youth,
Thou fear'st to speak unwelcome truth?

My soul no more thy censure grieves
Than frosts rob laurels of their leaves.
Say on—and yet—beware the rude
And wild distemper of my blood;
Loth were I that mine ire should wrong
The youth that bore my shield so long,
And who, in service constant still,
Though weak in frame, art strong in will."—
"Oh!" quoth the page, "even there depends
My counsel—there my warning tends—
Oft seems as of my master's breast
Some demon were the sudden guest;
Then at the first misconstrued word
His hand is on the mace and sword,

From her firm seat his wisdom driven,
His life to countless dangers given.—
O! would that Gunnar could suffice
To be the fiend's last sacrifice,
So that, when glutted with my gore,
He fled and tempted thee no more!"

VIII.

Then waved his hand, and shook his head,
The impatient Dane, while thus he said:
"Profane not, youth—it is not thine
To judge the spirit of our line—
The bold Berserkar's rage divine,

Through whose inspiring, deeds are wrought
Past human strength and human thought.
When full upon his gloomy soul
The champion feels the influence roll,
He swims the lake, he leaps the wall—
Heeds not the depth, nor plumbs the fall—
Unshielded, mail-less, on he goes
Singly against a host of foes;
Their spears he holds like wither'd reeds,
Their mail like maiden's silken weeds;
One 'gainst a hundred will he strive,
Take countless wounds, and yet survive.
Then rush the eagles to his cry
Of slaughter and of victory,--

And blood he quaffs like Odin's bowl,
Deep drinks his sword,—deep drinks his soul;
And all that meet him in his ire
He gives to ruin, rout, and fire,
Then, like gorged lion, seeks some den,
And couches till he's man agen.—
Thou know'st the signs of look and limb,
When 'gins that rage to over-brim—
Thou know'st when I am moved, and why;
And when thou seest me roll mine eye,
Set my teeth thus, and stamp my foot,
Regard thy safety and be mute.
But else, speak boldly out whate'er
Is fitting that a knight should hear.

I love thee, youth. Thy lay has power
Upon my dark and sullen hour;—
So Christian monks are wont to say
Demons of old were charm'd away;—
Then fear not I will rashly deem
Ill of thy speech whate'er the theme."

IX.

As down some strait in doubt and dread
The watchful pilot drops the lead,
And, cautious in the midst to steer,
The shoaling channel sounds with fear;
So, lest on dangerous ground he swerved,
The page his master's brow observed,

Pausing at intervals to fling
His hand on the melodious string,
And to his moody breast apply
The soothing charm of harmony,
While hinted half, and half exprest,
This warning song convey'd the rest.

1.

" Ill fares the bark with tackle riven,
And ill when on the breakers driven,—
Ill when the storm-sprite shrieks in air,
And the scared mermaid tears her hair;
But worse when on her helm the hand
Of some false traitor holds command.

2.

" Ill fares the fainting Palmer placed
'Mid Hebron's rocks or Rama's waste,—
Ill when the scorching sun is high,
And the expected font is dry,—
Worse when his guide o'er sand and heath,
The barbarous Copt, has plann'd his death.

3.

" Ill fares the knight with buckler cleft,
And ill when of his helm bereft,—
Ill when his steed to earth is flung,
Or from his grasp his falchion wrung.
But worse, of instant ruin token,
When he lists rede by woman spoken."

X.

" How now, fond boy?—Canst thou think ill,"
Said Harold, " of fair Metelill?"—
" She may be fair," the page replied,
As through the strings he ranged,—
" She may be fair; but yet,"—he cried,
And then the strain he changed,—

1.

"She may be fair," he sang, " but yet
Far fairer have I seen
Than she, for all her locks of jet,
And eyes so dark and sheen.
Were I a Danish knight in arms,
As one day I may be,

My heart should own no foreign charms,—
A Danish maid for me.

2.

"I love my father's northern land,
Where the dark pine-trees grow,
And the bold Baltic's echoing strand
Looks o'er each grassy oe.*
I love to mark the lingering sun,
From Denmark loth to go,
And leaving on the billows bright,
To cheer the short-lived summer night,
A path of ruddy glow.

* Oe. Island.

3.

" But most the northern maid I love,
With breast like Denmark's snow,
And form as fair as Denmark's pine,
Who loves with purple heath to twine
Her locks of sunny glow;
And sweetly blends that shade of gold
With the cheek's rosy hue,
And Faith might for her mirror hold
That eye of matchless blue.

4.

" 'Tis her's the manly sports to love
That southern maidens fear,

To bend the bow by stream and grove,
And lift the hunter's spear.
She can her chosen champion's fight
With eye undazzled see,
Clasp him victorious from the strife,
Or on his corpse yield up her life,—
A Danish maid for me."

X.

Then smiled the Dane—" thou canst so well
The virtues of our maidens tell,
Half could I wish my choice had been
Blue eyes, and hair of golden sheen,
And lofty soul;—yet what of ill
Hast thou to charge on Metelill?"—

"On her nought," young Gunnar said,
"But her base sire's ignoble trade.
Her mother, too—the general fame
Hath given to Jutta evil name,
And in her grey eye is a flame
Art cannot hide, nor fear can tame.—
That sordid woodman's peasant cot
Twice have thine honour'd footsteps sought,
And twice return'd with such ill rede
As sent thee on some desperate deed."—

XI.

"Thou errest; Jutta wisely said,
He that comes suitor to a maid,

Ere link'd in marriage, should provide
Lands and a dwelling for his bride—
My father's by the Tyne and Wear
I have reclaim'd."—" O, all too dear,
And all too dangerous the prize,
E'en were it won,"—young Gunnar cries.
" And then this Jutta's fresh device,
That thou should'st seek, a heathen Dane,
From Durham's priests a boon to gain,
When thou hast left their vassals slain
In their own halls."—Flash'd Harold's eye,
Thunder'd his voice—" False page, you lie!
The castle, hall and tower, is mine,
Built by old Witikind on Tyne;

The wild-cat will defend his den,
Fights for her nest the timid wren;
And think'st thou I'll forego my right
For dread of monk or monkish knight?—
Up and away, that deepening bell
Doth of the Bishop's conclave tell.
Thither will I, in manner due,
As Jutta bade, my claim to sue;
And, if to right me they are loth,
Then woe to church and chapter both!"
Now shift the scene and let the curtain fall,
And our next entry be Saint Cuthbert's hall.

END OF CANTO THIRD.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO FOURTH.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO FOURTH.

FULL many a bard hath sung the solemn gloom
Of the long Gothic aisle and stone-ribb'd roof,
O'er-canopying shrine, and gorgeous tomb,
Carved screen, and altar glimmering far aloof,
And blending with the shade—a matchless proof
Of high devotion, which hath now wax'd cold;
Yet legends say, that Luxury's brute hoof
Intruded oft within such sacred fold,
Like step of Bel's false priest, track'd in his fane of old.

Well pleased am I, howe'er, that when the route
Of our rude neighbours whilome deign'd to come,
Uncall'd, and eke unwelcome, to sweep out
And cleanse our chancel from the rags of Rome,
They spoke not on our ancient fane the doom
To which their bigot zeal gave o'er their own,
But spared the martyr'd saint and storied tomb,
Though papal miracles had graced the stone,
And though the aisles still loved the organ's swelling tone.

And deem not, though 'tis now my part to paint
A prelate sway'd by love of power and gold,
That all who wore the mitre of our Saint
Like to ambitious Aldingar I hold;

Since both in modern times and days of old
It sate on those whose virtues might atone
Their predecessors' frailties trebly told;
Matthew and Morton we as such may own—
And such (if fame speak truth) the honoured Barrington.

II.

But now to earlier and to ruder times,
As subject meet, I tune my rugged rhymes,
Telling how fairly the chapter was met,
And rood and books in seemly order set;
Huge brass-clasp'd volumes, which the hand
Of studious priest but rarely scann'd,

Now on fair carved desk display'd,
'Twas their's the solemn scene to aid.
O'er-head with many a scutcheon graced,
And quaint devices interlaced,
A labyrinth of crossing rows,
The roof in lessening arches shows;
Beneath its shade placed proud and high,
With footstool and with canopy,
Sate Aldingar, and prelate ne'er
More haughty graced Saint Cuthbert's chair.
Canons and deacons were placed below,
In due degree and lengthen'd row.
Unmoved and silent each sate there,
Like image in his oaken chair;

Nor head, nor hand, nor foot, they stirr'd,
Nor lock of hair, nor tress of beard,
And of their eyes severe alone
The twinkle shew'd they were not stone.

III.

The Prelate was to speech address'd,
Each head sunk reverend on each breast;
But ere his voice was heard—without
Arose a wild tumultuous shout,
Offspring of wonder mix'd with fear,
Such as in crowded streets we hear
Hailing the flames, that, bursting out,
Attract yet scare the rabble rout.

Ere it had ceased, a giant hand
Shook oaken door and iron band,
Till oak and iron both gave way,
Clash'd the long bolts, the hinges bray,
And ere upon angel or saint they can call,
Stands Harold the Dauntless in midst of the hall.

IV.

"Now save ye, my masters, both rocket and rood,
From Bishop with mitre to Deacon with hood!
For here stands Count Harold, old Witikind's son,
Come to sue for the lands which his ancestors won."
The Prelate look'd round him with sore troubled eye,
Unwilling to grant, yet afraid to deny,

While each Canon and Deacon who heard the Dane
speak,
To be safely at home would have fasted a week:—
Then Aldingar roused him and answer'd again,
"Thou suest for a boon which thou canst not obtain;
The church hath no fiefs for an unchristen'd Dane.
Thy father was wise, and his treasure hath given
That the priests of a chantry might hymn him to
heaven;
And the fiefs which whilome he possess'd as his due,
Have lapsed to the church, and been granted anew
To Anthony Conyers and Alberic Vere,
For the service Saint Cuthbert's bless'd banner to
bear,
When the bands of the North come to foray the Wear.

Then disturb not our conclave with wrangling or
blame,
But in peace and in patience pass hence as ye came."

V.

Loud laugh'd the stern Pagan—" They're free from
the care
Of fief and of service, both Conyers and Vere,—
Six feet of your chancel is all they will need,
A buckler of stone and a corslet of lead.—
Ho, Gunnar!—the tokens!"—and, sever'd anew,
A head and a hand on the altar he threw.
Then shudder'd with terror both Canon and Monk,
They knew the glazed eye and the countenance
shrunk,

And of Anthony Conyers the half-grizzled hair,
And the scar on the hand of Sir Alberic Vere.
There was not a churchman or priest that was there,
But grew pale at the sight, and betook him to prayer.

VI.

Count Harold laugh'd at their looks of fear:
"Was this the hand should your banner bear?
Was that the head should wear the casque
In battle at the church's task?
Was it to such you gave the place
Of Harold with the heavy mace?
Find me between the Wear and Tyne
A knight will wield this club of mine,—

Give him my fiefs, and I will say
There's wit beneath the cowl of gray."—
He raised it, rough with many a stain,
Caught from crush'd scull and spouting brain;
He wheel'd it that it shrilly sung,
And the aisles echoed as it swung,
Then dash'd it down with sheer descent,
And split King Osric's monument.—
" How like ye this music? How trow ye the hand
That can wield such a mace may be reft of its land?
No answer?—I spare ye a space to agree,
And Saint Cuthbert inspire you, a saint if he be.
Ten strides through your chancel, ten strokes on your bell,
And again I am with you,—grave fathers, farewell."

VII.

He turn'd from their presence, he clash'd the oak door,
And the clang of his stride died away on the floor;
And his head from his bosom the prelate uprears
With a ghost-seer's look when the ghost disappears.
" Ye priests of Saint Cuthbert, now give me your rede,
For never of counsel had Bishop more need!
Were the arch-fiend incarnate in flesh and in bone,
The language, the look, and the laugh were his own.
In the bounds of Saint Cuthbert there is not a knight
Dare confront in our quarrel yon goblin in fight,

Then rede me aright to his claim to reply,
'Tis unlawful to grant, and 'tis death to deny."

VIII.

On ven'son and malmsie that morning had fed
The Cellarer Vinsauf, 'twas thus that he said:
" Delay till to-morrow the Chapter's reply;
Let the feast be spread fair and the wine be pour'd high:
If he's mortal he drinks,—if he drinks, he is ours—
His bracelets of iron,—his bed in our towers."—
This man had a laughing eye,
Trust not, friends, when such you spy;

A beaker's depth he well could drain,
Revel, sport, and jest amain—
The haunch of the deer and the grape's bright dye
Never bard loved them better than I;
But sooner than Vinsauf fill'd me my wine,
Pass'd me his jest, and laughed at mine,
Though the buck were of Bearpark, of Bourdeaux the vine,
With the dullest hermit I'd rather dine
On an oaten cake and a draught of the Tyne.

IX.

Walwayn the Leech spoke next—he knew
Each plant that loves the sun and dew,

But special those whose juice can gain
Dominion o'er the blood and brain;
The peasant who saw him by pale moonbeam
Gathering such herbs by bank and stream,
Deem'd his thin form and soundless tread
Were those of wanderer from the dead.—
"Vinsauf, thy wine," he said, "hath power,
Our gyves are heavy, strong our tower;
Yet three drops from this flask of mine,
More strong than dungeons, gyves, or wine,
Shall give him prison under ground
More dark, more narrow, more profound.
Short rede, good rede, let Harold have—
A dog's death and a heathen's grave."—

I have lain on a sick man's bed,

Watching for hours for the leech's tread,

As if I deem'd that his presence alone

Were of power to bid my pain begone;

I have listed his words of comfort given,

As if to oracles from heaven;

I have counted his steps from my chamber door,

And bless'd them when they were heard no more;

But sooner than Walwayn my sick couch should nigh,

My choice were by leech-craft unaided to die.

X.

"Such service done in fervent zeal

The church may pardon and conceal,"

The doubtful prelate said, " but ne'er
The counsel ere the not should hear.—
Anselm of Jarrow, advise us now,
The stamp of wisdom is on thy brow,
Thy days, thy nights in cloister pent
Are still to mystic learning lent ;—
Anselm of Jarrow, in thee is my hope,
Thou well canst give counsel to prelate or pope."

XI.

Answer'd the Prior—" 'Tis wisdom's use
Still to delay what we dare not refuse ;
Ere granting the boon he comes hither to ask,
Shape for the giant gigantic task ;

Let us see how a step so sounding can tread
In paths of darkness, danger, and dread!
He may not, he will not, impugn our decree,
That calls but for proof of his chivalry,
And were Guy to return, or Sir Bevis the Strong,
Our wilds have adventure might cumber them long—
The castle of Seven Shields"——"Kind Anselm,
no more,
The step of the pagan approaches the door."
The churchmen were hush'd—In his mantle of skin,
With his mace on his shoulder, Count Harold
strode in.
There was foam on his lip, there was fire in his eye,
For, chafed by attendance, his fury was nigh.

" Ho! Bishop," he said, " dost thou grant me my
claim?
Or must I assert it by falchion and flame?"

XII.

" On thy suit, gallant Harold," the Bishop replied
In accents which trembled, " we might not decide,
Until proof of your strength and your valour we saw—
'Tis not that we doubt them, but such is the law."—
" And would you, Sir Prelate, have Harold make
sport
For the cowls and the shavelings that herd in thy
court?

Say what shall he do?—From the shrine shall he
tear
The lead bier of thy patron and heave it in air,
And through the long chancel make Cuthbert take
wing,
With the speed of a bullet dismiss'd from the sling?"
" Nay, spare such probation," the Cellarer said,
" From the mouth of our minstrels thy task shall be
read.
While the wine sparkles high in the goblet of gold,
And the revel is loudest, thy task shall be told;
And thyself, gallant Harold, shall, hearing it, tell
That the Bishop, his cowls, and his shavelings meant
well."

XIII.

Loud revell'd the guests, and the goblets loud rang,
But louder the minstrel, Hugh Meneville, sang;
And Harold, the hurry and pride of whose soul,
E'en when verging to fury, own'd music's controul,
Still bent on the harper his broad sable eye,
And often untasted the goblet pass'd by;
Than wine, or than wassail, to him was more dear
The minstrel's high tale of enchantment to hear;
And the Bishop that day might of Vinsauf complain
That his art had but wasted his wine-casks in vain.

XIV.

The Castle of the Seven Shields.

A BALLAD.

The Druid Urien had daughters seven,
Their skill could call the moon from heaven;
So fair their forms and so high their fame,
That seven proud kings for their suitors came.

King Mador and Rhys came from Powis and Wales,
Unshorn was their hair, and unpruned were their nails;
From Strath Clwyde came Ewain, and Ewain was lame,
And the red-bearded Donald from Galloway came.

Lot, King of Lodon, was hunch-back'd from youth;
Dunmail of Cumbria had never a tooth;
But Adolf of Bambrough, Northumberland's heir,
Was gay and was gallant, was young and was fair.

There was strife 'mongst the sisters, for each one would have
For husband King Adolf, the gallant and brave,
And envy bred hate, and hate urged them to blows,
When the firm earth was cleft, and the Arch-fiend arose!

He swore to the maidens their wish to fulfil—
They swore to the foe they would work by his will.

A spindle and distaff to each hath he given,
"Now hearken my spell," said the Outcast of heaven:

"Ye shall ply these spindles at midnight hour,
And for every spindle shall rise a tower,
Where the right shall be feeble, the wrong shall have
power,
And there shall ye dwell with your paramour."

Beneath the pale moonlight they sate on the wold,
And the rhimes which they chaunted must never be
told;
And as the black wool from the distaff they sped,
With blood from their bosom they moisten'd the thread.

As light danced the spindles beneath the cold gleam,
The castle arose like the birth of a dream—
The seven towers ascended like mist from the ground,
Seven portals defend them, seven ditches surround.

Within that dread castle seven monarchs were wed,
But six of the seven ere the morning lay dead;
With their eyes all on fire and their daggers all red,
Seven damsels surround the Northumbrian's bed.

"Six kingly bridegrooms to death we have done,
Six gallant kingdoms King Adolf hath won,

Six lovely brides all his pleasure to do,
Or the bed of the seventh shall be husbandless too."

Well chanced it that Adolf the night when he wed
Had confess'd and had sain'd him ere boune to his bed;
He sprung from the couch and his broadsword he drew,
And there the seven daughters of Urien he slew.

The gate of the castle he bolted and seal'd,
And hung o'er each arch-stone a crown and a shield;
To the cells of Saint Dunstane then wended his way,
And died in his cloister an anchorite grey.

Seven monarchs' wealth in that castle lies stow'd,
The foul fiends brood o'er them like raven and toad.
Whoever shall guesten these chambers within,
From curfew till matins, that treasure shall win.

But manhood grows faint as the world waxes old!
There lives not in Britain a champion so bold,
So dauntless of heart, and so prudent of brain,
As to dare the adventure that treasure to gain.

The waste ridge of Cheviot shall wave with the rye,
Before the rude Scots shall Northumberland fly,
And the flint clifts of Bambro' shall melt in the sun,
Before that adventure be peril'd and won.

XV.

" And is this my probation?" wild Harold he said,
" Within a lone castle to press a lone bed?—
Good even, my Lord Bishop,—Saint Cuthbert to borrow,
The Castle of Seven Shields receives me to-morrow."

END OF CANTO FOURTH.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO FIFTH.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO FIFTH.

DENMARK'S sage courtier to her princely youth,
Granting his cloud an ouzel or a whale,
Spoke, though unwittingly, a partial truth;
For Phantasy embroiders Nature's veil.
The tints of ruddy eve, or dawning pale,
Of the swart thunder-cloud, or silver haze,
Are but the ground-work of the rich detail
Which Phantasy with pencil wild pourtrays,
Blending what seems and is, in the rapt muser's gaze.

Nor are the stubborn forms of earth and stone
Less to the Sorceress's empire given:
For not with unsubstantial hues alone,
Caught from the varying surge, or vacant heaven,
From bursting sunbeam, or from flashing levin,
She limns her pictures—on the earth, as air,
Arise her castles, and her car is driven;
And never gazed the eye on scene so fair,
But of its boasted charms fancy gave half the share.

II.

Up a wild pass went Harold, bent to prove,
Hugh Meneville, the adventure of thy lay;

Gunnar pursued his steps in faith and love,
  Ever companion of his master's way.
Midward their path, a rock of granite grey
  From the adjoining cliff had made descent,—
A barren mass—yet with her drooping spray
  Had a young birch-tree crowned its battlement,
Twisting her fibrous roots through cranny, flaw, and
    rent.

This rock and tree could Gunnar's thought engage
  Till Fancy brought the tear-drop to his eye,
And at his master asked the timid page,
"What is the emblem that a bard should spy
In that rude rock and its green canopy?"

And Harold said, " Like to the helmet brave
Of warrior slain in fight it seems to lie,
And these same drooping boughs do o'er it wave
Not all unlike the plume his lady's favour gave."

" Ah, no!" replied the page; " the ill-starr'd love
Of some poor maid is in the emblem shewn,
Whose fates are with some hero's interwove,
And rooted on a heart to love unknown:
And as the gentle dews of heaven alone
Nourish those drooping boughs, and as the scathe
Of the red lightning rends both tree and stone,
So fares it with her unrequited faith,—
Her sole relief is tears—her only refuge death."

III.

" Thou art a fond fantastic boy,"
Harold replied, " to females coy,
Yet prating still of love :
Even so amid the clash of war
I know thou lovest to keep afar,
Though destined by thy evil star
With one like me to rove,
Whose business and whose joys are found
Upon the bloody battle-ground.
Yet, foolish trembler as thou art,
Thou hast a nook of my rude heart,
And thou and I will never part ;—

Harold would wrap the world in flame
Ere injury on Gunnar came."

IV.

The grateful page made no reply,
But turn'd to heaven his gentle eye,
And clasp'd his hands as one who said,
" My toils—my wanderings are o'erpaid !"
Then in a gayer, lighter strain,
Compell'd himself to speech again ;
And, as they flow'd along,
His words took cadence soft and slow,
And liquid, like dissolving snow,
They melted into song.

V.

" What though through fields of carnage wide
I may not follow Harold's stride,
Yet who with faithful Gunnar's pride
Lord Harold's feats can see?
And dearer than the couch of bride
He loves the bed of grey wolf's hide,
When slumbering by Lord Harold's side
In forest, field, or lea."

VI.

" Break off!" said Harold, in a tone
Where hurry and surprise were shown,

With some slight touch of fear,—

" Break off, we are not here alone;

A palmer form comes slowly on,

By cowl, and staff, and mantle known,

My monitor is near.

Now mark him, Gunnar, heedfully;

He pauses by the blighted tree—

Dost see him, youth?—Thou could'st not see

When in the vale of Galilee

I first beheld his form,

Nor when we met that other while

In Cephalonia's rocky isle,

Before the fearful storm,—

Dost see him now ?"—The page, distraught
With terror, answer'd, " I see nought,
And there is nought to see,
Save that the oak's scathed boughs fling down
Upon the path a shadow brown,
That, like a pilgrim's dusky gown,
Waves with the waving tree."

VII.

Count Harold gazed upon the oak
As if his eye-strings would have broke,
And then resolvedly said,—
" Be what it will, yon phantom grey,
Nor heaven, nor hell, shall ever say

That for their shadows from his way
Count Harold turn'd dismay'd:
I'll speak him, though his accents fill
My heart with that unwonted thrill
Which vulgar minds call fear.
I will subdue it!"—Forth he strode,
Paused where the blighted oak-tree show'd
Its sable shadow on the road,
And, folding on his bosom broad
His arms, said, "Speak—I hear."

VIII.

The Deep Voice said, "O wild of will,
Furious thy purpose to fulfil—

Heart-sear'd and unrepentant still,
How long, O, Harold, shall thy tread
Disturb the slumbers of the dead?
Each step in thy wild way thou makest
The ashes of the dead thou wakest;
And shout in triumph o'er thy path
The fiends of bloodshed and of wrath.
In this thine hour, yet turn and hear!
For life is brief and judgment near."

IX.

Then ceased The Voice.—The Dane replied
In tones where awe and inborn pride
For mastery strove,—" In vain ye chide

The wolf for ravaging the flock,
Or with its hardness taunt the rock,—
I am as they—my Danish strain
Sends streams of fire through ev'ry vein.
Amid thy realms of goule and ghost,
Say, is the fame of Erick lost?
Or Witikind's the Waster, known
Where fame or spoil was to be won;
Whose galleys ne'er bore off a shore
They left not black with flame?—
He was my sire,—and, sprung of him,
That rover merciless and grim,
Can I be soft and tame?
Part hence, and with my crimes no more upbraid me,
I am that Waster's son, and am but what he made me."

X.

The phantom groan'd, the mountain shook around,
The faun and wild-doe started at the sound,
The gorse and fern did wildly round them wave,
As if some sudden storm the impulse gave.
" All thou hast said is truth—Yet on the head
Of that bad sire let not the charge be laid,
That he, like thee, with unrelenting pace,
From grave to cradle ran the evil race:—
Relentless in his avarice and ire,
Churches and towns he gave to sword and fire
Shed blood like water, wasted every land,
Like the destroying angel's burning brand;
Fulfill'd whate'er of ill might be invented,
Yes—all these things he did—he did, but he REPENTED!

Perchance it is part of his punishment still,
That his offspring pursues his example of ill.
But thou, when thy tempest of wrath shall next shake thee,
Gird thy loins for resistance, my son, and awake thee;
If thou yield'st to thy fury, how tempted soever,
The gate of repentance shall ope for thee NEVER!"

XI.

"He is gone," said Lord Harold, and gazed as he spoke;
"There is nought on the path but the shade of the oak,—

He is gone, whose strange presence my feeling oppress'd,
Like the night-hag that sits on the slumberer's breast.
My heart beats as thick as a fugitive's tread,
And cold dews drop from my brow and my head.—
Ho! Gunnar, the flasket yon almoner gave;
He said that three drops would recall from the grave.
For the first time Count Harold owns leech-craft has power,
Or, his courage to aid, lacks the juice of a flower!"
The page gave the flasket, which Walwayn had fill'd
With the juice of wild roots that his art had distill'd—
So baneful their influence on all that had breath,
One drop had been frenzy, and two had been death.

Harold took it, but drank not; for jubilee shrill,
And music and clamour, were heard on the hill,
And down the steep pathway, o'er stock and o'er stone,
The train of a bridal came blithesomely on;
There was song, there was pipe, there was timbrel, and still
The burden was, "Joy to the fair Metelill!"

XI.

Harold might see from his high stance,
Himself unseen, that train advance
With mirth and melody;—

On horse and foot a mingled throng,
Measuring their steps to bridal song
And bridal minstrelsy;
And ever when the blithesome rout
Lent to the song their choral shout,
Redoubling echoes roll'd about,
While echoing cave and cliff sent out
The answering symphony
Of all those mimic notes which dwell
In hollow rock and sounding dell.

XII.

Joy shook his torch above the band,
By many a various passion fann'd;—

As elemental sparks can feed
On essence pure and coarsest weed,
Gentle, or stormy, or refined,
Joy takes the colours of the mind.
Lightsome and pure, but unrepress'd,
He fired the bridegroom's gallant breast;
More feebly strove with maiden fear,
Yet still joy glimmer'd through the tear
On the bride's blushing cheek, that shows
Like dew-drop on the budding rose;
While Wulfstane's gloomy smile declared
The joy that selfish avarice shared
And pleased revenge and malice high
Its semblance took in Jutta's eye.

On dangerous adventure sped,

The witch deem'd Harold with the dead,

For thus that morn her Demon said :—

" If, ere the set of sun, be tied

The knot 'twixt bridegroom and his bride,

The Dane shall have no power of ill

O'er William and o'er Metelill."

And the pleased witch made answer, " Then

Must Harold have pass'd from the paths of men !

Evil repose may his spirit have,—

May hemlock and mandrake find root in his grave,—

May his death-sleep be dogg'd by dreams of dismay,

And his waking be worse at the answering day !".

XIII.

Such was their various mood of glee
Blent in one shout of ecstacy.
But still when joy is brimming highest,
Of sorrow and misfortune nighest,
Of Terror with her ague cheek,
And lurking Danger, sages speak:—
These haunt each path, but chief they lay
Their snares beside the primrose way.—
Thus found that bridal band their path
Beset by Harold in his wrath.
Trembling beneath his maddening mood,
High on a rock the giant stood;

His shout was like the doom of death
Spoke o'er their heads that pass'd beneath.
His destined victims might not spy
The reddening terrors of his eye,—
The frown of rage that writhed his face,—
The lip that foam'd like boar's in chase;—
But all could see—and, seeing, all
Bore back to shun the threaten'd fall,—
The fragment which their giant foe
Rent from the cliff and heaved to throw.

XIV.

Backward they bore;—yet are there two
For battle who prepare:

No pause of dread Lord William knew
Ere his good blade was bare;
And Wulfstane bent his fatal yew,
But ere the silken cord he drew,
As hurl'd from Hecla's thunder, flew
That ruin through the air!—
Full on the outlaw's front it came,
And all that late had human name,
And human face, and human frame,
That lived, and moved, and had free will
To chuse the path of good or ill,
Is to its reckoning gone
And nought of Wulfstane rests behind,
Save that beneath that stone,

Half-buried in the dinted clay,
A red and shapeless mass there lay,
Of mingled flesh and bone!

XV.

As from the bosom of the sky
The eagle darts amain,
Three bounds from yonder summit high
Placed Harold on the plain.
As the scared wild-fowl scream and fly,
So fled the bridal train;
As 'gainst the eagle's peerless might
The noble falcon dares the fight,
But dares the fight in vain,

So fought the bridegroom; from his hand
The Dane's rude mace has struck his brand,
Its glittering fragments strew the sand,
Its lord lies on the plain.
Now, Heaven, take noble William's part,
And melt that yet unmelted heart,
Or, ere his bridal hour depart,
The hapless bridegroom's slain!

XVI.

Count Harold's frenzied rage is high,
There is a death-fire in his eye,
Deep furrows on his brow are trench'd,
His teeth are set, his hand is clench'd,

The foam upon his lip is white,
His deadly arm is up to smite!
But, as the mace aloft he swung,
To stop the blow young Gunnar sprung,
Around his master's knees he clung,
And cried, "In mercy spare!
O, think upon the words of fear
Spoke by that visionary seer,
The crisis he foretold is here,—
Grant mercy,—or despair!"
This word suspended Harold's mood,
Yet still with arm upraised he stood,
And visage like the headsman's rude
That pauses for the sign.

"O mark thee with the blessed rood,"
The page implored; "Speak word of good,
Resist the fiend, or be subdued!"
He signed the cross divine—
Instant his eye hath human light,
Less red, less keen, less fiercely bright,
His brow relax'd the obdurate frown,
The fatal mace sinks gently down,
He turns and strides away;
Yet oft, like revellers who leave
Unfinish'd feast, looks back to grieve,
As if repenting the reprieve
He granted to his prey.

Yet still of forbearance one sign hath he given,
And fierce Witikind's son made one step towards heaven.

XVII.

But though his dreaded footsteps part,
Death is behind and shakes his dart;
Lord William on the plain is lying,
Beside him Metelill seems dying!—
Bring odours—essences in haste—
And lo! a flasket richly chased,—
But Jutta the elixir proves
Ere pouring it for those she loves—

Then Walwayne's potion was not wasted,
For when three drops the hag had tasted,
So dismal was her yell,
Each bird of evil omen woke,
The raven gave his fatal croak,
And shriek'd the night-crow from the oak,
The screech-owl from the thicket broke,
And flutter'd down the dell!
So fearful was the sound and stern,
The slumbers of the full-gorged erne
Were startled, and from furze and fern
Of forest and of fell,
The fox and famish'd wolf replied,
(For wolves then prowl'd the Cheviot side,)

From mountain head to mountain head
The unhallow'd sounds around were sped;
But when their latest echo fled,
The sorceress on the ground lay dead.

XVIII.

Such was the scene of blood and woes
With which the bridal morn arose
Of William and of Metelill;
But oft, when dawning 'gins to spread,
The summer-morn peeps dim and red
Above the eastern hill,
Ere, bright and fair, upon his road
The King of splendour walks abroad;

So, when this cloud had pass'd away,
Bright was the noon-tide of their day,
And all serene its setting ray.

END OF CANTO FIFTH.

Harold the Dauntless.

CANTO SIXTH.

HAROLD THE DAUNTLESS.

CANTO SIXTH.

WELL do I hope that this my minstrel tale
Will tempt no traveller from southern fields,
Whether in tilbury, barouche, or mail,
To view the Castle of these Seven proud Shields.
Small confirmation its condition yields
To Meneville's high lay,—No towers are seen
On the wild heath, but those that Fancy builds,
And, save a fosse which tracks the moor with green,
Is nought remains to tell of what may there have been.

And yet grave authors, with the no small waste
Of their grave time, have dignified the spot
By theories, to prove the fortress placed
By Roman bands, to curb the invading Scot.
Hutchinson, Horsley, Camden, I might quote,
But rather chuse the theory less civil
Of boors, who, origin of things forgot,
Refer still to the origin of evil,
And for their master-mason chuse that master-fiend
the Devil.

II.

Therefore, I say, it was on fiend-built towers
That stout Count Harold bent his wondering gaze,

When evening dew was on the heather flowers,
And the last sunbeams bade the mountain blaze,
And tinged the battlements of other days
With a bright level light ere sinking down.—
Illumined thus, the dauntless Dane surveys
The seven proud shields that o'er the portal frown,
And on their blazons traced high marks of old renown.

A wolf North Wales had on his armour-coat,
And Rhys of Powis-land a couchant stag;
Strath-Clwyde's strange emblem was a stranded boat,
Donald of Galloway a trotting nag;

A corn-sheaf gilt was fertile Lodon's brag;
A dudgeon-dagger was by Dunmail worn;
Northumbrian Adolf gave a sea-beat crag
Surmounted by a cross—such signs were borne
Upon these antique shields, all wasted now and worn.

III.

These scann'd, Count Harold sought the castle door,
Whose ponderous bolts were rusted to decay;
Yet till that hour adventurous knight forbore
The unobstructed passage to essay.
More strong than armed warders in array,
And obstacle more sure than bolt or bar,
Sate in the portal Terror and Dismay,

While Superstition, who forbade to war
With foes of other mould than mortal clay,
Cast spells across the gate, and barr'd the onward way.

Vain now those spells—for soon with heavy clank
The feebly-fasten'd gate was inward push'd,
And, as it oped, through that emblazon'd rank
Of antique shields the wind of evening rush'd
With sound most like a groan, and then was hush'd.
Is none who on such spot such sounds could hear
But to his heart the blood had faster rush'd,
Yet to bold Harold's breast that throb was dear—
It spoke of danger nigh, but had no touch of fear.

IV.

Yet Harold and his page no signs have traced
Within the castle that of danger show'd;
For still the halls and courts were wild and waste,
As through their precincts the adventurers trode.
The seven huge towers rose stately, tall, and broad,
Each tower presenting to their scrutiny
A hall in which a king might make abode,
And fast beside, garnish'd both proud and high,
Was placed a bower for rest in which a king might lie.

As if a bridal there of late had been,
Deck'd stood the table in each gorgeous hall,

And yet it was two hundred years, I ween,
Since date of that unhallow'd festival.
Flagons, and ewers, and standing cups, were all
Of tarnish'd gold, or silver nothing clear,
With throne begilt, and canopy of pall,
And tapestry clothed the walls with fragments sear,—
Frail as the spider's mesh did that rich woof appear.

V.

In every bower, as round a hearse, was hung
A dusky crimson curtain o'er the bed,
And on each couch in ghastly wise were flung
The wasted reliques of a monarch dead;

Barbaric ornaments around were spread,
Vests twined with gold, and chains of precious stone,
And golden circlets, meet for monarch's head;
While grinn'd, as if in scorn amongst them thrown,
The wearer's fleshless scull, alike with dust bestrown.

For these were they who, drunken with delight,
On pleasure's opiate pillow laid their head,
For whom the bride's shy footstep, slow and light,
Was changed ere morning to the murderer's tread.
For human bliss and woe in the frail thread
Of human life are all so closely twined,
That till the shears of fate the texture shred,

The close succession cannot be disjoin'd,
Nor dare we from one hour judge that which comes
behind.

VI.

But where the work of vengeance had been done,
In that seventh chamber, was a sterner sight;
There of the witch-brides lay each skeleton,
Still in the posture as to death when dight.
For this lay prone, by one blow slain outright;
And that, as one who struggled long in dying;
One bony hand held knife as if to smite;
One bent on fleshless knees as mercy crying;
One lay across the door, as kill'd in act of flying.

The stern Dane smiled this charnel-house to see,—
For his chafed thought return'd to Metelill;—
And "Well," he said, "hath woman's perfidy,
Empty as air, as water volatile,
Been here avenged.—The origin of ill
Through woman rose, the Christian doctrine saith;
Nor deem I, Gunnar, that thy minstrel skill
Can show example where a woman's breath
Hath made a true-love vow, and, tempted, kept her faith."

VII.

The minstrel boy half smiled, half sigh'd,
And his half-filling eyes he dried,

And said, ‘ The theme I should but wrong
Unless it were my dying song,
(Our Scalds have said in dying hour
The Northern harp has treble power,)
Else could I tell of woman's faith
Defying danger, scorn, and death.
Firm was that faith,—as diamond stone
Pure and unflaw'd,—her love unknown,
And unrequited;—firm and pure,
Her stainless faith could all endure,
From clime to clime,—from place to place,—
Through want, and danger, and disgrace,
A wanderer's wayward steps could trace.—

All this she did, and guerdon none
Required, save that her burial-stone
Should make at length the secret known.
Thus hath a faithful woman done.—
Not in each breast such truth is laid,
But Eivir was a Danish maid."—

VIII.

" Thou art a wild enthusiast," said
Count Harold, " for thy Danish maid;
And yet, young Gunnar, I will own
Her's were a faith to rest upon.
But Eivir sleeps beneath her stone,
And all resembling her are gone.

What maid e'er show'd such constancy
In plighted faith like thine to me?
But couch thee, boy; the darksome shade
Falls thickly round, nor be dismay'd
Because the dead are by.
They were as we; our little day
O'erspent, and we shall be as they.
Yet near me, Gunnar, be thou laid,
Thy couch upon my mantle made,
That thou mayst think, should fear invade,
Thy master slumbers nigh."
Thus couch d they in that dread abode
Until the beams of dawning glow'd.

IX.

An alter'd man Lord Harold rose,
When he beheld that dawn unclose—
There's trouble in his eyes,
And traces on his brow and cheek
Of mingled awe and wonder speak:
"My page," he said, "arise;—
Leave we this place, my page."—Nor more
He utter'd till the castle door
They cross'd—but there he paused and said,
"My wildness hath awaked the dead—
Disturb'd the sacred tomb!—
Methought this night I stood on high
Where Hecla roars in middle sky,

And in her cavern'd gulphs could spy
The central place of doom !
And there before my mortal eye
Souls of the dead came flitting by,
Whom fiends, with many a fiendish cry,
Bore to that evil den !
My eyes grew dizzy, and my brain
Was wilder'd, as the elvish train,
With shriek and howl, dragg'd on amain
Those who had late been men.

X.

" With hagard eyes and streaming hair
Jutta, the Sorceress, was there,

And there pass'd Wulfstane, lately slain,
All crush'd and foul with bloody stain.—
More had I seen, but that uprose
A whirlwind wild, and swept the snows;
And with such sound as when at need
A champion spurs his horse to speed,
Three armed knights rush on, who lead
Caparison'd a sable steed.
Sable their harness, and there came
Through their closed visors sparks of flame.
The first proclaim'd in sounds of fear,
'Harold the Dauntless, welcome here!'
The next cried, 'Jubilee! we've won
Count Witikind the Waster's son!'

And the third rider sternly spoke,
'Mount in the name of Zernebock!—
From us, O Harold, were thy powers,—
Thy strength, thy dauntlessness, are ours;
Nor think, a vassal thou of hell,
With hell canst strive.' The fiend spoke true!
My inmost soul the summons knew,
As captives know the knell,
That says the headsman's sword is bare,
And with an accent of despair
Commands them quit their cell.
I felt resistance was in vain,
My foot had that fell stirrup ta'en,
My hand was on the fatal mane,

When to my rescue sped
That palmer's visionary form,
And—like the passing of a storm—
The demons yell'd and fled!

XI.

"His sable cowl flung back, reveal'd
The features it before conceal'd,
And, Gunnar, I could find
In him whose counsels strove to stay
So oft my course on wilful way,
My father Witikind!
Doom'd for his sins, and doom'd for mine,
A wanderer upon earth to pine

Until his son shall turn to grace,

And smooth for him a resting-place!—

Gunnar, he must not haunt in vain

This world of wretchedness and pain:

I'll tame my wilful heart to live

In peace—to pity and forgive—

And thou, for so the vision said,

Must in thy lord's repentance aid;

Thy mother was a prophetess,

He said, who by her skill could guess

How close the fatal textures join

Which knit thy thread of life with mine;

Then, dark, he hinted of disguise

She framed to cheat too curious eyes,

That not a moment might divide
Thy fated footsteps from my side.
Methought while thus my sire did teach,
I caught the meaning of his speech,
Yet seems its purport doubtful now."—
His hand then sought his thoughtful brow,—
Then first he mark'd, that in the tower
His glove was left at waking hour.

XII.

Trembling at first, and deadly pale,
Had Gunnar heard the vision'd tale;
But when he learn'd the dubious close,
He blushed like any opening rose,

And, glad to hide his tell-tale cheek,
Hied back that glove of mail to seek;
When soon a shriek of deadly dread
Summon'd his master to his aid.

XIII.

What sees Count Harold in that bower,
So late his resting-place?—
The semblance of the Evil Power,
Adored by all his race!
Odinn in living form stood there,
His cloak the spoils of Polar bear
For plumy crest, a meteor shed
Its gloomy radiance o'er his head,

Yet veil'd its hagard majesty
To the wild lightnings of his eye.
Such height was his, as when in stone
O'er Upsal's giant altar shown;
So flow'd his hoary beard;
Such was his lance of mountain-pine,
So did his sevenfold buckler shine;—
But when his voice he rear'd,
Deep, without harshness, slow and strong
The powerful accents roll'd along,
And, while he spoke, his hand was laid
On captive Gunnar's shrinking head.

XIV.

" Harold," he said, " What rage is thine
To quit the worship of thy line,
To leave thy warrior god ?—
With me is glory or disgrace,
Mine is the onset and the chase,
Embattled hosts before my face
Are wither'd by a nod.
Wilt thou then forfeit that high seat,
Deserved by many a dauntless feat
Among the heroes of thy line,
Eric and fiery Thorarine ?—
Thou wilt not. Only I can give
The joys for which the valiant live,

Victory and vengeance—only I
Can give the joys for which they die,-
The immortal tilt—the banquet full,
The brimming draught from foeman's scull.
Mine art thou,'witness this thy glove,
The faithful pledge of vassal's love."

XV.

" Tempter," said Harold, firm of heart,
" I charge thee, hence! whate'er thou art,
I do defy thee—and resist
The kindling frenzy of my breast,
Waked by thy words; and of my mail
Nor glove, nor buckle, splent, nor nail,

Shall rest with thee—that youth release,
And, God, or Demon, part in peace."—
" Eivir," the Shape replied, " is mine,
Mark'd in the birth-hour with my sign.
Think'st thou that priest with drops of spray
Could wash that blood-red mark away?
Or that a borrow'd sex and name
Can abrogate a Godhead's claim?"—
Thrill'd this strange speech through Harold's brain,
He clench'd his teeth in high disdain,
For not his new-born faith subdued
Some tokens of his ancient mood.—
" Now, by the hope so lately given
Of better trust and purer heaven,

I will assail thee, fiend!"—Then rose
His mace, and with a storm of blows
The mortal and the demon close.

XVI.

Smoke roll'd above, fire flash'd around,
Darken'd the sky and shook the ground;
But not the artillery of hell,
The bickering lightning, nor the rock
Of turrets to the earthquake's shock,
Could Harold's courage quell.
Sternly the Dane his purpose kept,
And blows on blows resistless heap'd,
Till quail'd that demon form;

And—for his power to hurt or kill
Was bounded by a higher will—
Evanish'd in the storm.
Nor paused the champion of the North,
But raised, and bore his Eivir forth,
From that wild scene of fiendish strife,
To light, to liberty, and life!

XVII.

He placed her on a bank of moss,
A silver runnel bubbled by,
And new-born thoughts his soul engross,
And tremors yet unknown across
His stubborn sinews fly,

The while with timid hand the dew
Upon her brow and neck he threw,
And mark'd how life with rosy hue
On her pale cheek revived anew,
And glimmer'd in her eye.
Inly he said, " That silken tress,
What blindness mine that could not guess,
Or how could page's rugged dress
That bosom's pride belie?
O, dull of heart, through wild and wave
In search of blood and death to rave,
With such a partner nigh!"

XVIII.

Then in the mirror'd pool he peer'd,
Blamed his rough locks and shaggy beard,
The stains of recent conflict clear'd,—
And thus the champion proved,
That he fears now who never fear'd,
And loves who never loved.
And Eivir—life is on her cheek,
And yet she will not move or speak,
Nor will her eyelid fully ope;
Perchance it loves, that half-shut eye,
Through its long fringe, reserved and shy,
Affection's opening dawn to spy;

And the deep blush, which bids its dye
O'er cheek, and brow, and bosom fly,
Speaks shame-facedness and hope.

XIX.

But vainly seems the Dane to seek
For terms his new-born love to speak,—
For words, save those of wrath and wrong,
Till now were strangers to his tongue;
So, when he raised the blushing maid,
In blunt and honest terms he said,—
('Twere well that maids, when lovers woo,
Heard none more soft, were all as true,)

"Eivir! since thou for many a day
Hast follow'd Harold's wayward way,
It is but meet that in the line
Of after-life I follow thine.
To-morrow is Saint Cuthbert's tide,
And we will grace his altar's side,
A Christian knight and Christian bride;
And of Witikind's son shall the marvel be said,
That on the same morn he was christen'd and wed."

END OF CANTO SIXTH.

CONCLUSION.

And now, Ennui, what ails thee, weary maid?
And why these listless looks of yawning sorrow?
No need to turn the page, as if 'twere lead,
Or fling aside the volume till to-morrow.—
Be cheer'd—'tis ended—and I will not borrow,
To try thy patience more, one anecdote
From Bartholine, or Perinskiold, or Snorro.
Then pardon thou thy minstrel, who hath wrote
A Tale six cantos long, yet scorn'd to add a note.

FINIS.

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